DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 112 308 CG 010 081

AUTHOR Lunneborg, Patricia W.
TITLE Vocational Indecision in College Graduates. Educational Assessment Center Reports.
INSTITUTION Washington Univ., Seattle. Educational Assessment Center.
REPORT NO EAC-Project-271
PUB DATE Jun 75
NOTE 10p.; Not available in hard copy due to marginal legibility of original document

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.76 Plus Postage. HC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS *Career Planning; *College Graduates; Comparative Analysis; *Decision Making; Graduate Surveys; Higher Education; *Occupational Aspiration; *Vocational Maturity

ABSTRACT

This study compared 127 vocationally undecided college graduates matched by sex, age, and major with graduates who had selected an occupation on a Survey of Graduating Seniors. Undecideds had a significantly lower GPA than decideds, intended noncareer activities following graduation, less often were going to graduate school, and were far less satisfied with their university experience. Increases in indecisiveness in high school and college might be countered either through vocational counseling geared more to graduates' academic achievement or through facilitating a nonvocational orientation toward college. (Author)

****
* Documents acquired by ERIC include many informal unpublished *
* materials not available from other sources. ERIC makes every effort *
* to obtain the best copy available. Nevertheless, items of marginal *
* reproducibility are often encountered and this affects the quality *
* of the microfiche and hardcopy reproductions ERIC makes available *
* via the ERIC Document Reproduction Service (EDRS). EDRS is not *
* responsible for the quality of the original document. Reproductions *
* supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made from the original. *
****

ED112308

Educational Assessment Center

University of Washington

June 1975

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION

THIS DOCUMENT HAS BEEN REPRODUCED EXACTLY AS RECEIVED FROM THE PERSON OR ORGANIZATION ORIGINATING IT. POINTS OF VIEW OR OPINIONS STATED DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT OFFICIAL NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION POSITION OR POLICY

Vocational Indecision in College Graduates

Patricia W. Lunneborg

This study compared 127 vocationally undecided college graduates matched by sex, age, and major with graduates who had selected an occupation on a Survey of Graduating Seniors. Undecideds had a significantly lower GPA than decideds, intended non-career activities following graduation, less often were going to graduate school, and were far less satisfied with their university experience. Increases in indecisiveness in high school and college might be countered either through vocational counseling geared more to graduates' academic achievement or through facilitating a non-vocational orientation towards college.

Educational Assessment Center Project: 271.

CG 010 081

Vocational Indecision in College Graduates

Vocational indecisiveness continues to be studied by few researchers in counseling (Osipow, 1973) at the same time that it is on the increase among high school seniors (AGPA Guidepost, 1974, p. 6). Results of the few investigations that have been reported are mixed, but several studies (Ashby, Wall, & Osipow, 1966; Elton & Rose, 1971; Lunneborg, in press; Rose & Elton, 1971) support the notion "... that being decided might have something to do with achievement and performance patterns" (Osipow, 1973, p. 57). The implications of this conclusion for counselors are enormous; even if a student has a major field but cannot perform adequately or competitively in it, the student's problem is not one of uncrystallized interests or lack of commitment. Ashby, Wall, & Osipow (1966) make a point of the different counseling procedures needed in dealing with uncertain students who perform less well academically vs. those whose indecision is indeed a matter of interest differentiation, personality factors, etc.

In a survey designed for university baccalaureates (Class of '74) several items were included to better understand career decision-making in college (deWolf, 1975). The present study focused on those graduates who still did not know what they wanted to do. It was hypothesized that academic achievement would be negatively related to vocational indecision, that undecideds would have declared their majors later, would have done so for personal (as contrasted to career-related) reasons, and would have found all aspects of their university experience less satisfying, as previously found with undecided college juniors (Hecklinger, 1972).

Method

Sample. Of 1,514 baccalaureate recipients June-August 1974 from the University of Washington, 59% (898) completed a "Survey of Graduating Seniors" (1974) in the three months following graduation. Of these 898 individuals, 14% (127) listed no intended occupation (don't know, undecided, etc.). These 57 females and 70 males (called the undecideds) were paired by computer selection with 127 other graduates from the total sample on the basis of sex, age, and major (this second group called the decideds). The distribution of major areas for the undecideds did not deviate significantly from the proportions observed in the total sample even though there were minor differences. Following are the percentages for undecideds with the percentages in the total sample in parentheses: Arts, 6 (8), Social Science, 36 (30), Natural Science, 22 (26), Humanities, 32 (29), and Miscellaneous, 4 (7). Thus, there was a slight tendency for undecideds to come from the Social Sciences and Humanities, their top-ranked majors in descending order being Sociology, Psychology, English, History, and Political Science.

Procedure. The responses of these matched pairs of graduates were compared for those survey items pertinent to vocational indecision (example, Why did you choose your particular major? followed by seven response alternatives) using χ^2 analyses or correlated t-tests of mean differences.

Results

Predictive correlates. The expected achievement difference was found. There was a -.09 difference in cumulative college GPA for undecideds compared to decideds. While not large, this difference was statistically

significant ($t = 2.14$, d.f. 126, $p < .025$). It parallels earlier findings with upperclass students who had not declared a major, where concurrent academic performance and pre-college academic achievement were the most predictive variables of indecision (Lunneborg, in press).

The second prediction which was confirmed concerned the item which listed reasons for choosing one's major. When these were divided into career-related reasons vs. personal reasons, and the frequencies of undecideds in each category employed as the "expected values," the vocationally decided sample significantly more often had selected their major as career preparation, 41% compared to 23% ($\chi^2 = 23.4$, 1 d.f., $p < .0005$).

Relationships which were not confirmed included a prediction regarding the institutional origin of the graduates, i.e., whether they were "natives" at the University or transfers from either two-year or four-year colleges. Significantly more undecideds had completed all their undergraduate work at the University, while the prediction had been in the other direction, that the transfer students with less exposure to the University would be more vocationally adrift. In line with this prediction was one that predicted undecideds would have begun college later than decideds, but there were no differences between the matched pairs. Likewise, there were no differences between undecideds and decideds in terms of the time of selecting the major. Undecideds did not select later as anticipated.

Two other hypotheses that were not supported related to the amount of employment and volunteer experience which the pairs had had. Undecideds had no less paid employment and, contrary to hypothesis, had done more rather than less volunteer work.

Concurrent correlates. In accord with the hypothesis that fewer undecided graduates would be going to graduate school the year following graduation, 40% of the decided sample had applied to graduate school vs. only 16% of the undecided sample. Similarly, when asked the most probable activity the year following graduation, it was expected that undecideds would more often check non-career activities, i.e., military, travel, homemaking, and full-time non-career work. Indeed, 73% of undecideds opted for these activities vs. 36% of the decideds ($\chi^2 = 79.1$, 1 d.f., $p < .0005$).

A series of items tested the hypothesis that undecideds would be less happy with their University education than decideds. Satisfaction with choice of major was measured by a four-point scale. A one-tailed t-test of the differences between the matched pairs of graduates supported the prediction ($t = 4.02$, d.f. 125, $p < .0005$). A similar hypothesis was made with respect to instruction in the major field. There was a significantly lower rating of such instruction among undecideds ($t = 2.02$, d.f. 125, $p < .025$). A like hypothesis with respect to instruction outside the major was also supported although significant only at the .05 point ($t = 1.69$, d.f. 125). Finally, on a five-point scale of "emotional feeling towards" the major department, undecideds were significantly less positive towards their departments ($t = 2.71$, d.f. 125, $p < .005$).

Four items for which the hypotheses found no support included one on which students reported whether their ideas had changed during their University career vis-a-vis eight concepts such as "social equality" and "democracy." No less change among undecideds was found. Likewise, the graduates rated the degree of the University's impact upon these ideas.

No differences between the matched pairs were found for the concepts of law, reason, democracy, nature, nationalism, or social equality. However, decideds indicated greater impact upon their concept of "education" ($t = 1.93$, d.f. 79, $p < .05$) and "social responsibility" ($t = 2.07$, d.f. 46, $p < .05$). Lastly, the t-test of the graduates' rating of the University's emphasis on undergraduate education was nonsignificant (they were equally disaffected) and there was no difference between the groups in their rating of their major department's emphasis on undergraduate education.

Discussion

In a national representative sample of college graduates, Class of 1970, Astin and Bisconti (1973) reported the percentage of students undecided about their career choice as 7% for men and 5% for women. Finding 14% in 1974, taking into account the limitations of this sample, represents a sobering 100% increase in just four years.

The profile of the undecided college graduate derived from this comparison with decideds of the same sex, age, and major department is that of an individual who in college did less well and enjoyed it less. This person does not lack employment experience, as might be expected, and indeed has even more volunteer work than the average decided graduate. The undecided graduate was not motivated in college study by vocational goals and is not motivated in the future to seek out career-related activities. This lack of career orientation to higher education need not necessarily spell a less pleasant college experience but, for this sample of undecideds, it did.

As the job market tightens and competition for graduate study increases, the percentage of undecided college graduates can be expected to increase. Their indecision will be associated primarily with knowledge of their lesser academic performance and with less overall satisfaction with college. Student personnel workers can take either of two general directions in dealing with the prospective vocationally-undecided graduate: (1) accept that a vocational choice in college is desirable and help students to make it consistent with their abilities and academic achievement as Ashby, Wall, & Osipow (1966) and Hecklinger (1972) would seem to suggest, or (2) accept that such a vocational choice is outmoded and help students to benefit from the university experience in ways not tied to work as Warnath (1975) urges. To repeat Warnath's conclusion:

> Because they (counselors) are central to the life planning of millions of people, their responsibility for assisting in the search for means other than paid employment through which people can gain meaning from life is all the greater. (p. 428)

References

Ashby, J. D., Wall, H. W., & Osipow, S. H. Vocational certainty and indecision in college freshmen. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1966, 44, 1037-1041.

Astin, H. W. & Bisconti, A. S. Career plans of college graduates of 1965 and 1970. Bethlehem, Pa.: College Placement Council Report No. 2, 1973.

College Board scores up. APGA Guidepost, October 1974, p. 6.

de Wolf, V. A. The 1974 College of Arts and Sciences survey of graduating seniors. Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1975.

Elton, C. F., & Rose, H. A. A longitudinal study of the vocationally undecided male student. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 1971, 1, 85-92.

Hecklinger, F. J. The undecided student--is he less satisfied with college? Journal of College Student Personnel, 1972, 13, 247-251.

Lunneborg, P. W. Interest differentiation in high school and vocational indecision in college. Journal of Vocational Behavior, in press.

Osipow, S. H. Theories of career development (2nd ed.). Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey: Prentice-Hall, 1973.

Rose, H. A., & Elton, C. F. Attrition and the vocationally undecided student. Journal of Vocational Behavior, 1971, 1, 99-103.

Survey of graduating Seniors. Seattle: University of Washington, Educational Assessment Center, 1974.

Warnath, C. F. Vocational theories: Direction to nowhere. Personnel and Guidance Journal, 1975, 53, 422-428.